

# Monitoring Change in Residential Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods which were once stable and thriving, and are today declining, undesirable, or abandoned, can be found in almost any city. In contrast, certain areas which were considered "dead" ten years ago are currently experiencing a revival. Local level planners and policy makers try to understand what makes one neighborhood decline while another thrives. Traditionally, they have conducted "windshield surveys" of housing conditions and examined census data for changes in the demographic characteristics of an area. These techniques serve to describe the changing residential character of the area, but fail to reveal the whole picture or to provide adequate explanations. Additionally, these sources are often relied on "after the fact"; that is, when a neighborhood has already reached a stage where little can be done.

Planners and policy makers seek tools with which to better understand and measure the characteristics of neighborhood change. An improved information base, in the form of a monitoring system for neighborhood change, offers a comprehensive measure of conditions in individual areas as well as a way to compare various sections of the city.

Monitoring involves the systematic collection of comparable data over time. In the case of neighborhood change, a monitoring system would include information on the overall condition or "state" of each neighborhood in the city. The monitoring system would provide an early warning mechanism with which to recognize signs of neighborhood decline and plan interventions before a neighborhood reaches a stage where little can be done.

The system offers accessible data on all neighborhoods with which to make decisions regarding the selection of a site for a particular government program, or the strategy appropriate to a particular area. Evaluations of interventions can be conducted

by measuring the state of the neighborhood before, during, and after the program.

The local level planner or policy maker can find the bases for establishing a monitoring system for his or her community in this article. Initially, one must understand the process of neighborhood change and apply it to the local context. The steps involved in designing a monitoring system as well as some examples of approaches to monitoring are described. Finally, a proposal to monitor neighborhood change which graduate students from the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina presented to the city of Wilmington, North Carolina, illustrates how change could be measured in a medium-sized southern city.

## Understanding Neighborhood Change

Neighborhoods have been defined variously in terms of geographic boundaries, demographic characteristics, housing conditions, and services provided. The planner interested in neighborhood conservation may think in terms of what makes a person choose a particular house in a particular neighborhood. The location, the people and other houses in the neighborhood, and the services provided as well as ability to pay for housing influence the buyer's decision.

For the purchaser looking for housing with particular characteristics, a house in one of a number of neighborhoods may satisfy his or her demands ("substitutability"). At some point in time, a neighborhood which previously satisfied a person's demand for housing no longer does so. This change may reflect changes in the characteristics of that individual or that neighborhood. One person's decision to move to or from the neighborhood influences the decisions of others: neighborhood residents, investors, and providers of services. The neighborhood change process is a result of this series of actions and reactions.

The "state" of a particular neighborhood reflects the interrelationship among those who make decisions about the neighborhood and the actual conditions in the area. A neighborhood may be thought of as "stable," "declining," or "improving" at any one point in time.

Hughes and Blakely identify certain universal characteristics of a stable neighborhood; that is, one which is considered to provide a good residential environment. A stable neighborhood does not have to be new or of high socioeconomic status, although it frequently meets one or both of these criteria.

---

*Ann L. Silverman is a second year student in the Department of City and Regional Planning, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill concentrating in housing and community development. She has previously studied housing conditions in Jerusalem, Israel for the Jerusalem City Planning Department, and in Columbia, Maryland for the Rouse Co. Department of Community Services and Facilities.*

Population stability and particular physical conditions mark such neighborhoods:

Residents are not burdened by severe economic problems, they have a psychological sense of satisfaction, comfort, and control... the stability of such neighborhoods derives from a condition of "steady state"; even though families are frequently moving in and out of the neighborhood, its social status tends to remain constant... Differing population groups—defined either by race, social or family status—can coexist in a good neighborhood but, again, only in a condition of balance or upward shift. Lower status groups cannot expand rapidly in proportion to the remaining residents... Good neighborhoods tend to be free from invasions of nonresidential land uses, higher density housing types, and new residents of radically different socioeconomic levels... It is only when the gap widens between the socioeconomic characteristics of incoming and outmoving households that neighborhood change is initiated... This change can result in neighborhood improvement or deterioration. (1975, pp. 46-47)

Most discussions of neighborhood change focus on decline. Declining neighborhoods may be characterized by rapid population turnover, and by a population with a declining socioeconomic status and older age. Structures are old and sometimes obsolete. As buildings depreciate in value, confidence in the neighborhood (on the part of residents, investors, financial institutions, and city officials) wanes. If allowed to decline to the furthest possible level, the neighborhood and its buildings will ultimately be abandoned by residents.

The most widely recognized model of neighborhood change grew out of a study of the problem of wide-scale abandonment of buildings and neighborhoods. In this study, *The Dynamics of Neighborhood Change*, Public Affairs Counseling concluded that abandonment was the last stage in a process of neighborhood decline. Employing a life and death analogy, the model (hereafter referred to as *Dynamics*) depicts the neighborhood as possessing a "life cycle" from birth to death. The neighborhood moves from one stage of its life to the next. The speed of neighborhood change is critical. In contrast to an organism, a neighborhood has a power of regeneration.

According to the *Dynamics* model, there are five stages in the neighborhood's life cycle. These stages can be described in terms of the decisions made by households, investors, and public and private institutions as well as the physical, social, economic, and institutional characteristics of the neighborhood:

1. *Healthy Viable Neighborhood*—new neighborhoods where both single family and multifamily construction is occurring and well-maintained

older areas—high rates of ownership, limited ethnic or racial change, stable household composition, smoothly functioning real estate market, average family income in excess of citywide average, adequate quality of life;

2. *Incipient Decline*—deferral of maintenance and repair expenditures becomes evident—older stock necessitates higher per unit expenditure, remodeling may be necessary—as neighborhood loses competitive edge, changes occur;
3. *Clearly Declining*—conditions of Stage 2 become more pronounced—maintenance and modernization requirements become more critical as reinvestment in housing stock is deferred over a longer period of time—changes in social structure—real estate market continues to lose vitality;
4. *Accelerated Decline*—disinvestment on the part of public and private sector continues—socioeconomic level of population continues to decline—real estate market basically ceases to exist—old buildings, negative cash flow, high operating costs, minimal reinvestment, pessimistic attitudes;
5. *Abandoned*—the neighborhood has declined to the point where current land uses are no longer economic—few residents, buildings are badly deteriorated, many are abandoned, city services are non-existent or severely inadequate, private sector institutions have withdrawn from the area.

(as synthesized from Public Affairs Counseling 1976, pp. 23-30)

The model is useful in that it sets forth guidelines with which to classify neighborhoods. In fact, the framework, including the five stages, has been adopted by numerous agencies in their attempts to



Decline may be evidenced by structural as well as neighborhood conditions.

Photo by Blair Pollock



monitor neighborhood change and evaluate change-oriented programs in specific localities. The *Dynamics* model does, however, possess certain weaknesses which may limit its applicability. It neglects to consider the neighborhood in its particular historical-political context, and seems to ignore variations in the "birth" of neighborhoods. Some areas may never have been socially cohesive or structurally sound. Others simply outgrew their use. There are differences in the manner in which neighborhoods move (often not in a very systematic way) from one stage to the next.

There is a bias in the neighborhood descriptors towards certain definitions of a good neighborhood (one income, one race, one type of land use). Ethnic or racial change is assumed to be a key sign of impending deterioration (Hughes and Blakely 1975, p. 53).

These assumptions seem out of place in a description of nonmetropolitan southern cities. The drastic social and economic changes which follow racial change in metropolitan cities are often not apparent in nonmetropolitan cities. According to Stegman and Sumka, "the process by which housing is allocated to blacks in these cities has been very different from the frequently observed central-city pattern of racial invasion and succession." In many southern cities, neighborhoods were constructed exclusively for blacks. The demand for new housing by blacks was satisfied only in these neighborhoods. The stability of the nonmetropolitan housing market is not indicative of a lack of problems, but rather of a different type of housing market which requires different types of solutions (1976, pp. 15-16; p. 210).

While the *Dynamics* model may provide local governments with an important first step in understanding neighborhood change, it is important that the user remain aware of its limitations and the need to adapt it to the particular local context.

---

**"Monitoring involves the systematic collection of comparable data over time."**

---

### **Formulating Indicators of Change**

Once the planner or policy maker has an overview of the process of neighborhood change, he or she can begin to apply this understanding to the local situation. It is useful to derive a typology of the city's neighborhoods. Given limited data and knowledge, however, it may be desirable to study other cities' approaches and to modify one of these so that it suits the local context.

Certain key questions should be asked regarding the particular locality. How is a healthy, viable neighborhood defined locally? Who are the different client groups? How do their demands for housing differ? How well does the current housing market serve the demands of these various groups?

The boundaries of neighborhoods should be clearly demarcated. The planner should consider whether census tract designations, a readily available breakdown of the city, are an accurate reflection of the city's neighborhoods as defined by political, geographic, and other considerations, or whether some other unit of measurement should be established.

Broad dimensions or constructs which describe neighborhoods (physical conditions, demographic characteristics, investment climate, and so on) need to be formulated. Within each construct, one can begin to conceptualize what the indicators of change are. For example, how do the physical characteristics of the neighborhood change from stage to stage? In what ways does the demographic composition of the area change over time? What happens, in investment terms, to make a neighborhood decline or improve?

Once a satisfactory list of indicators has been obtained, one can consider what sources of data exist for each indicator. The system designer should not think only in terms of the traditional sources of data, but should consider sources available outside of the city planning department and outside of city government. Examining and considering alternative data measures is one of the most time-consuming tasks in formulating the indicator system. Data measures should be assembled in a consistent format which allows for easy updating.

After the data is assembled, a system of weights or points may be devised by which the assorted pieces of information are combined into meaningful indices. The task of monitoring would fall to persons within the city's long-range planning or evaluation section. The process would, however, involve personnel from various city and county agencies (building inspector's office, registry of deeds, tax office, and others) as well as the cooperation of private organizations (banks, realtors, community organizations).

### **Approaches to Monitoring**

In recent years, several cities have made efforts to monitor neighborhood change. The approaches taken to monitoring vary in accordance with the purposes of the particular system and the sources relied on for data and conceptualization. Efforts undertaken in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Memphis, Tennessee, are cited here to indicate two possible approaches to monitoring.

The Pittsburgh system originated in an evaluation of the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) program begun as a Pittsburgh effort to stem neighborhood decline (Ahlbrandt and Brophy 1975). Now in operation in over twenty U.S. cities, the NHS program aims to facilitate increased private investment and higher levels of maintenance in neighborhoods which do not require extensive public investment to be stabilized.

Ahlbrandt and Brophy see the price paid for housing as a key indicator of change. Given the origins of this monitoring system in a program

concerned with housing finance, this emphasis is not surprising:

Neighborhood change is observed when the psychology of residents, investors, real estate interests, lending institutions and local government concerning the future of the neighborhood alters. Such change manifests itself through the housing market in the demand for both homeownership and rental property, and it is eventually observed in the transaction prices for property in that location.... Changes in residential real estate transaction prices capture the gross effect of neighborhood change and are therefore used in this analysis as a proxy for shifts in the relative desirability of one neighborhood vis-a-vis alternative locations.... However, to refine the gross measure for neighborhood change, additional data are examined. (1975, p. 95)

The elements of change given in the five stages of *Dynamics* provided the basis for the Pittsburgh monitoring system. Variables which describe neighborhood change, as identified by Ahlbrandt and Brophy, and the assumptions associated with these variables, are as follows:

1. Residential real estate transactions prices
  - the effects of neighborhood change are captured in the *price individuals are willing to pay for housing*
  - the *distribution of houses available for sale* has not changed significantly over time
  - *housing market dynamics* are similar among neighborhoods
2. Socio-economic variables
  - *population change* reflects the desirability of a neighborhood relative to alternative locations
  - *race* — increasing percentage of minority population may be synonymous with neighborhood decline; racial change may have an effect on lending practices
  - *age of population* — higher percentages of elderly may be synonymous with neighborhood decline
  - *income* — housing choices are related to income; lower income neighborhoods will offer poorer housing choices
3. Housing variables
  - changes in the *number of units* are responsive to changes in the demand for housing
  - increased *vacancies* are a function of a declining demand for housing
  - *quality of the stock* — percentage of overcrowded units and percent of those lacking plumbing may be used as prox-

- ies for the adequacy of the existing housing stock
  - as the *age of stock* increases, the need for maintenance does likewise
  - increasing *homeownership* may be an indication that the neighborhood is improving
  - *rents* reflect quality of the unit, ability of the tenant to pay, and strength of the rental market
4. Variables describing investment in housing
    - *tax delinquency* may reflect disinvestment or an attempt to obtain additional income from a property
    - changes in *building permits* issued may be a proxy for the direction of neighborhood change
    - *mortgage and home improvement loan activity* reflect changes in the involvement of financial institutions in the neighborhood and reinvestment in housing
    - *reasons for investment in housing*, as indicated by recent property buyers, reflect attitudes to the neighborhood
  5. Variables describing quality of life
    - *attitudes towards neighborhood conditions*, as indicated by recent property buyers
- (1975, Part III: Appendix A)

The Pittsburgh monitoring system makes use of various sources of information from within city government as well as nongovernmental resources. Data for residential real estate transaction prices were drawn from a file on real estate transactions maintained in Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning, and from the Profile of Change prepared for the city of Pittsburgh by R. L. Polk Company.<sup>1</sup> Mortgage lending activity was described in the above mentioned file and in the County Record of Deeds, while data on home improvement loans was obtained from three commercial banks. The latter was only available for outstanding accounts. The city of Pittsburgh's Bureau of Building Inspection provided building permit data. A time series was constructed from property tax records in the City Treasurer's Office to indicate the number of tax delinquent properties. Surveys of NHS loan recipients and of recent property buyers were undertaken to indicate attitudes to neighborhood conditions. The City's Police Department collected major crime data by census tract (Ahlbrandt and Brophy 1975, Part III: Appendix B).

Data for the NHS area was compared with other neighborhoods in Pittsburgh to measure the impact of the program. The report suggests strategies to correspond to neighborhoods according to their stage of decline. For neighborhoods in the incipient and clearly declining stages, a strategy would involve a concentrated code enforcement program



Figure 1  
**Recommended Treatments According to Minimum Housing Code Enforcement Program**

*Stage One*—annual exterior survey to identify hazards and obvious violations—"windshield survey" of areas not normally encompassed in code enforcement programs

*Stage Two*—code enforcement for preventive maintenance in older, basically sound neighborhoods where property values are beginning to fall—block-by-block inspection with code violations discussed with property owners—postpone legal enforcement as long as some improvement is made in a six-month period.

*Stage Three*—areas in clear decline will require a major educational effort in addition to eliciting community support and a strong door-to-door inspection program—code enforcement should be tied to a financial assistance program so that rehabilitation can in fact be accomplished without disrupting the fiscal affairs of the owner—postpone legal enforcement as long as property owners are actively investigating possible sources of financial assistance for rehabilitation.

*Stage Four*—areas in the last stages of decline represent a severe challenge to the program—Minimum Housing Code Program here must be tied to a program of low-cost, long-period loans or grants—include a program of City Service delivery to maximize the probability of neighborhood preservation—a major educational program is key

*Stage Five*—use the Minimum Housing Code Program here only in conjunction with Urban Renewal or other major housing effort—it is unlikely, given the City's present resources, that such areas can be effectively rehabilitated (City of Wilmington, N.C. 1976).

to upgrade the housing stock. If private-sector financing is not available, it is recommended that the city provide funds at a subsidized interest rate. A composite of the data gathered according to the above mentioned variables would indicate the state of the neighborhood.

Given a limited allocation of Community Development Block Grant (CD) funds, Memphis planners wished to determine which areas of the city were most in need of the physical improvements which could be provided using these funds. Memphis' Policy Planning and Analysis Bureau created a

"Geographic Priority Area Identification System" to identify areas in substandard condition on a street-by-street basis.

The Memphis group adopted a bias towards measuring physical conditions in accordance with the requirements for CD funds. They formulated four indices: an environmental services index, a structural rating scale, a cross impact analysis, and a socioeconomic index.

For the first index, the conditions of streets, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, vacant lots, and drainage facilities were checked by trained local observers. Streets were scored from zero (perfect) to one hundred (completely blighted) points for each condition. These scores were then aggregated to arrive at overall ratings of good (0-10 points), fair (11-25 points), poor (26-45 points), and substantially deteriorated (46+ points).

The same observers who rated environmental conditions determined the condition of structures in each street segment. Structures were categorized by use (residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, or public facility), and then scored on the following four point scale:

1. good—no observed exterior problems
2. fair—minor problems which could be corrected
3. poor—structure requires major work
4. substantially deteriorated—beyond repair.

After compiling 1. and 2., the analysts constructed a cross impact matrix to show the relationships between the two rating scales, and to display a combined rating in a single numerical value, using the same four point classification system.

The combined rating each street segment received in the cross impact matrix determined the level of community development treatment required to improve its conditions. Each street segment was designated for one of the following treatments: surveillance; maintenance and minor rehabilitation; major rehabilitation and minor redevelopment; major redevelopment.

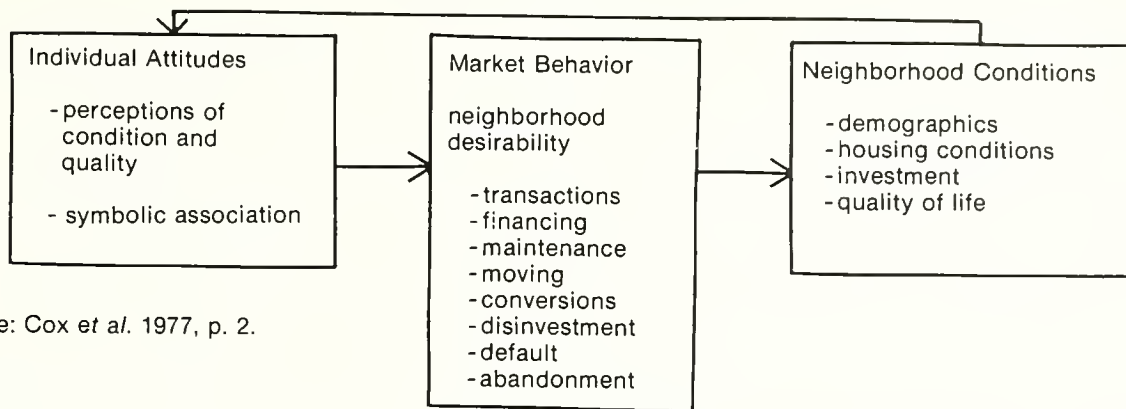
To add a non-physical component to the system, an index of socioeconomic conditions for each census tract was developed from 1970 census data



Housing conditions vary in Wilmington's NHS area.

Photo by Bruce Stiffel

Figure 2  
Elements of Neighborhood Change



Source: Cox et al. 1977, p. 2.

for the factors of poverty, overcrowded housing, population density, educational attainment, income, and family organization. Using a map overlay of the 1970 census tract boundaries on the street segments, it was possible to combine housing, environmental, and socioeconomic data, and to identify problem areas.

The initial street segment analysis and the grouping into problem areas resulted in the identification of 134 priority areas with an estimated treatment cost of \$363.7 million. With only \$6 million available, it was necessary to limit further the number of possible treatment areas. Guidelines were generated; first by cost, second by a needs assessment, and finally using three levels of criteria and assigning points at each level:

- Level 1...residential character of the area; environmental feasibility; growth pattern,
- Level 2...probable threat to existing code enforcement or urban renewal projects; deficiencies in streets, curbs, gutters, housing; city services to the area,
- Level 3...completion time (under three years); cost per person (spread benefits to the maximum number of persons); geographic distribution.

Based on this process, nine priority areas were selected to receive the Community Development funds (Yurman 1976).

The Pittsburgh and Memphis examples provide two approaches to monitoring. Other cities are also making progress in this area (see, for example, Office of Local Assistance 1975, and Real Estate Research Corporation 1977).

### A Proposal for Wilmington, N.C.

The city of Wilmington, N.C., is actively engaged in programs of neighborhood conservation and revitalization. An NHS program was initiated in one Wilmington neighborhood to improve the investment climate and living conditions in that area. A Minimum Housing Code Enforcement Program

matches treatments to neighborhood conditions by recommending enforcement strategies according to the five stages of *Dynamics* (see Figure 1). The City Planning Department recognized Wilmington's neighborhoods as aggregated into seventeen areas of similar size called "assemblies." Efforts are currently underway to improve the information basis for neighborhood change-related decisions in Wilmington. Currently, two systems of data are available. Some sources provide information on Wilmington according to census tracts while others record data by assemblies. The City Planning Department now has access to a computerized Property Tax File. The file includes information on structural conditions, property values, and the year structures were erected, aggregated by assembly. Wilmington's Profile of Change, prepared by R.L. Polk Company, is a source of information by census tract. The Evaluation Office has monitored the effectiveness of city services and programs. A planner in the city's Planning Department has begun work on a typology of neighborhoods and potential measures of change (Farris 1977).

During the spring semester of 1977, a graduate seminar in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, focused on the NHS program beginning in Wilmington. A group of students from this seminar chose to devise a scheme for evaluating change in the NHS area and a model for measuring neighborhood change citywide. A conceptual model of neighborhood change and a recommended set of indicators and data measures resulted from the group's work (What follows is a brief overview. For the complete proposal including assumptions and detailed descriptions of data sources, see Cox et al., 1977).

A model of the actions and reactions which lead to neighborhood change was designed to describe the relationships among individual attitudes, neighborhood desirability, the behavior of various actors, and neighborhood conditions. The model suggests that change in any one of the four areas will result in change in other aspects of the chain (see Figure 2).



The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation system is to estimate neighborhood conditions and the changes that occur in them. The broad categories used to describe neighborhood conditions, as listed in the model, become the system's constructs of neighborhood change: housing investment, housing characteristics, quality of life, and population characteristics. *Housing investment* reflects the buying and selling of housing and related activities such as loans and maintenance commitments made to the property by the owner. *Housing characteristics* describe the physical condition of the housing and other important elements such as age and owner occupancy. *Quality of life* variables are non-housing elements that indicate how people feel about living in the neighborhood. *Population characteristics* may provide clues to neighborhood desirability as well as abilities to maintain and improve housing.

Each of the four constructs is composed of a number of components or indicators of change. For example, indicators of change in housing investment include: residential real estate transactions, availability and utilization of financing, owner commitment to maintenance and improvement, owner default and disinvestment.

The state of the neighborhood is reflected in the measures which correspond to each indicator. Availability and utilization of financing, for example, is measured in terms of lenders' perceptions, conventional mortgage loans, home improvement loans, and the degree to which nonconventional financing is utilized. The report describes the data sources for each measure as well as the assumptions behind each indicator (see Figure 3 for an overview of the monitoring system).

**"A stable neighborhood does not have to be of high socioeconomic status or to be new."**

The intention was not so much to compile data as it was to understand where data appropriate to the measures could be found and what form the data was in. One field survey of housing conditions in the NHS area was conducted. Data sources examined fall into three categories: those sources available to and used regularly by the planning department; data which exists in city/county government but not in a form convenient for the monitoring system; data which exists outside of government. In addition, the proposal suggests other possible sources of information which were not examined (see Figure 4).

Assuming that it would not be necessary and the city could not afford to explore all possible sources of data, the proposal concludes with recommendations as to which data sources would bring the city greatest use for the effort, as listed below (Cox et al. 1977, pp. 24-25):

Figure 3  
Constructs, Indicators, and Measures of Change

Construct	Indicator	Measure
1. Housing Investment	Residential real estate transactions	Lenders'/realtors' attitudes Real estate market transactions
	Availability and utilization of financing	Lenders' perceptions Conventional mortgage loans Home improvement loans Non-conventional financing
	Owner commitment to maintenance and improvement	Owner/renter attitudes Requests for home improvement loans Building permits obtained Code abatements
	Owner default and disinvestment	Tax delinquency Foreclosures Abandonments
2. Housing Characteristics	Physical condition	Structural soundness Age Crowding
	Owner occupancy	% owner occupied % vacant
	Vacant and abandoned units	Number of abandoned units
	Conversions	Building permits Number of multi-units
3. Quality of Life	Rents	Rent levels
	Neighborhood security	Incidence of crime Fires and traffic accidents Resident attitudes Hazardous threats
	Quality of services	Activity/attitudinal indices
4. Population Characteristics	Attachment to place	Activity/attitudinal indices
	Income as a sign of capacity to maintain and improve homes	Neighborhoods with low income households Neighborhoods where income levels are falling Change in housing value to income ratio Rate of turnover
	Rate of population change	Change in number of households over time
4. Population Characteristics	Trend in size of population	Proportion of elderly residents
	Population characteristics	Racial proportions

Source: Cox et al. 1977, pp. 3-4

#### 1. Housing Investment

In the area of housing investment, the most important indicators are: residential real estate transactions, availability of financing, and owner commitment to maintenance. In terms of establishing data bases, it is suggested that the following actions be taken:

- A) A thorough examination of the County Record of Deeds, with consideration given to the assembly of an ongoing (computer) file of residential real estate transactions in the City Planning Department,
- B) A thorough examination of the City tax records, with consideration given to the assembly of an ongoing (computer) file of this information in the City Planning Department (Some of this information has already been assembled in the New Hanover County Real Property Tax File),
- C) A thorough examination of the City's record of building permits, with consideration given to the assembly of an ongoing file of this information in the City Planning Department,
- D) It would also be valuable to develop more thorough records with regard to lending activity due to the significant role this activity plays in the neighborhood change process. The Mortgage Disclosure Act may facilitate the collection of this data.

## 2. Housing Conditions

In the area of housing conditions, the most important indicators are: physical condition of housing, vacancies, and owner occupancy rates. The following actions are recommended:

- A) If the Planning Department decides to conduct a city-wide survey of the structural soundness of the city's housing stock, it is suggested that the rating technique used in the NHS area Housing Conditions Survey be applied. The Department presently does not have data on structural soundness which rates individual neighborhoods. This information can be used to provide rough estimates of rehabilitation costs for its neighborhood intervention efforts.
- B) A measure of vacancies should be developed utilizing a resident survey or neighborhood committees to keep track of vacancies.
- C) The best source of owner-occupancy data is the Polk Co. data file.

## 3. Quality of Life

In the area of quality of life, the most important indicators are: satisfaction with services and feelings of safety. While these quality of life indicators will be of great value in developing a complete system for monitoring and evaluating neighborhood change, they are not as significant as are the other elements discussed, and they will be time consuming and expensive to gather. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to place priorities elsewhere in data collection. Nonetheless, the action for establishing quality of life indicators are included:

- A) Satisfaction with services would seem to have the most significance to public officials. Such data could be obtained through extension of the survey methods developed within the 1975 Community Analysis.

- B) Crime, fire, and accident data would also be very important in developing a statistical portrait of the changing quality of neighborhood life. This information should be available within the confines of existing departmental files.

## 4. Income and Population Characteristics

In the area of income and population characteristics, the most important indicators are: changing income and number of households. In terms of establishing measures for these indicators, the following actions are recommended:

- A) The Polk Co. data file is the best source for compiling data on both demographic and income changes. While the city should be cautious of the inherent biases in this information, it still represents the most current, complete, and retrievable accumulation of data that is presently available.

## Recommended Next Steps

The system outlined in this article can be the foundation of a proposal to monitor neighborhood change in the city of Wilmington, N.C. Assuming that Wilmington, or any other city, is interested in developing the system, it would be necessary to carry out a second phase encompassing the assembly of data in a meaningful form and the

Figure 4  
Data Sources By Type

- 1. Sources presently available to/used by planners .....
  - The 1975 Community Analysis
  - The 1965 Neighborhood Analysis
  - Polk Profiles of Change
  - 1970 Census Data
  - Property Tax File
- 2. Sources presently available in government but not in a convenient form .....
  - County Record of Deeds
  - Tax Office
  - Building Inspector's Office
  - Minimum Housing Code Inspection Office
- 3. Sources presently available outside of government .....
  - Data which banks are required to reveal in accordance with the 1975 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act
  - Informal interviews with lenders, realtors
- 4. Other possible sources of information .....
  - Further informal interviews and attitudinal surveys of residents, lenders, realtors
  - Activity pattern studies
  - Examination of bank records on home improvement loans
  - Fire and Highway Department Reports
  - Police Files
  - Monitoring done by community organizations or neighborhood groups of: abandonments, turnover in rental housing, fears/threats of nonconforming uses



establishment of a weighting system with which to classify neighborhoods into treatment areas. Before this could be done, however, it would be important to have more local input into the existing categories to insure that they accurately reflect the current Wilmington situation.

In Wilmington's case, it would also be advisable to correct the problem caused by some data being available by census tracts and some by assemblies. If the assemblies are an accurate reflection of Wilmington's neighborhoods, the city may want to petition to have its census tract boundaries redrawn to match the assemblies.

The quantity and sophistication of data gathering will depend on the amount of money which the city decides to allocate towards monitoring. It is recommended that the city begin with those "sources presently available in government but not in a convenient form" (Figure 4).

---

## "How is a healthy, viable neighborhood defined locally?"

---

The assembly of some of the data could be performed at minimal costs by student interns in the Planning Department or Evaluation Office. Other information could be gathered by the neighborhood monitoring group as recommended above. Workers in the offices which contain the data (such as the County Record of Deeds) could be induced to keep their records in a format which would allow for computer access to that information needed for monitoring. Once the data is arranged in a convenient format, updating will not be a difficult task. Students involved in the Wilmington study group have already explored some of the data sources and have established formats by which this data could be assembled (Cox *et al.* 1977, Appendices).

### Note

1. The R. L. Polk Company has been in the business of gathering local data on an annual basis for many years. This data was generally used by banks, retail firms, and other businesses for market and economic forecasting. Recently, the company developed a program (Profiles of Change) to package its data in a form useful to local planning agencies. This program provides an annual source of data by census tract for many U.S. cities and towns.

### References

- Ahlbrandt, Roger, Jr., and Paul C. Brophy. March 1975. *An Evaluation of Pittsburgh's Neighborhood Housing Services Program*. Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing.
- City of Wilmington, N.C. March 8, 1976. *Policy Statement—Minimum Housing Code Enforcement Program*. Unpublished paper. Wilmington, N.C.
- Cox, L., M. Franke, M. Orfeo, A. Richman, A. Silverman. April 22, 1977. *A Monitoring System for Neighborhood Change: Suggested Indicators and Data Measures*. Unpublished paper. Chapel Hill: Department of City and Regional Planning, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Farris, William. 1977. *Notes on Neighborhood Indicators*. Unpublished paper. Wilmington, N.C.: Wilmington-New Hanover County Planning Department.
- Hughes, James W., and Kenneth Blakely, Jr. 1975. *Urban Homesteading*. New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University.
- Office of Local Assistance. December 1975. *Monitoring Change in Residential Neighborhoods*. Boston, Mass.: Office of Local Assistance, Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs.
- Public Affairs Counseling. December 1975. *The Dynamics of Neighborhood Change*. San Francisco.
- Real Estate Research Corporation. 1977. "Identifying Neighborhoods for Preservation and Renewal." *Real Estate Report*. First Quarter: 6.
- Stegman, Michael A. and Howard J. Sumka. 1976. *Nonmetropolitan Urban Housing*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company.
- Yurman, Dan. February 1976. "Focused Investment in the City." *Practicing Planner* 6: 16-24.